

ARE YOU FILLED?

Joel 2:28-32

I like to play badminton, but that can be hard to do here in Iowa unless you play indoors. The wind always seems to be blowing. In the past month we have had so many days when either the wind blows from the south and really warms things up or it blows from the north and cools everything down. The wind can wear us out as it beats at us. It brings tornadoes and ice storms. It creates major drifts out of an inch of snowfall. But without the wind there would be no weather—no rain, no snow, no pollination. Our land, our earth would be lifeless without wind. Wind brings life!

In the Bible the words for “spirit,” “breath,” and “wind” are interchangeable. When God created Adam, He breathed into Him. In other words the Spirit went into Adam. Job 27:3 says, “As long as I have life within me, the breath of God in my nostrils.” Life is defined as God’s breath in a person. Conversely Psalm 104:29 says, “When you take away their breath (Spirit), they die and return to the devil.” In Ezekiel’s famous vision the dry bones did not come to life until God breathed on them. A wind is what held back the waters of the Red Sea for the children of Israel to cross over on dry ground. As Psalm 18:15 says God did this, “By the breath of His mouth.” Psalm 33:6 says, “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of His nostrils.” In contrast idols were seen as breathless—lifeless. Psalm 39:5 says of us, “Each man’s life is but a breath.” James 4:14 says, “You are a mist that appears for a while and then vanishes.” The Holy Spirit, as we say in the Nicene Creed, is the “giver of life.” He is the wind, the breath, the power that brings life to you and me.

God spoke through His prophet Joel and said, “I will pour out My Spirit on all people.” That prophecy came true on Pentecost when the Spirit appeared in the sound of wind and the flames of fire over the disciples’ heads. But the prophecy comes true each time the Spirit breathes life in people through baptism and through how the Spirit comes to us in His Word and Holy Communion to strengthen and fill us. The Spirit should be with us giving us life as He did to the disciples on Pentecost. But is He? Are you and I filled? Think of a balloon. By itself it is just there, lifeless. But when we fill it with air, we can do things with it. It floats around. It can move when we release it. Are we a filled balloon or just limp?

People today talk a lot about spirituality—about being filled—filled with possibilities, filled with energy, filled with happiness and contentment. But do we have that spirituality? God spoke through Joel and said, but is that what we have experienced? Do we feel filled with that Spirit? I would like to suggest that we need to answer three things about the Holy Spirit: 1.) Why is the Holy Spirit given to us? 2.) Who is the Spirit poured on? 3.) What keeps us from being filled with the Spirit?

Why is the Holy Spirit given to us? God says in our text, “I will pour out My Spirit.” But why? So we can feel filled and feel good? If we look at the verses in Joel after our lesson

for this morning, God tells us, “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.” The Spirit filled the disciples on Pentecost not to make them feel “spiritual” but to move them into action, the action of proclaiming His Gospel to the people gathered in Jerusalem for that first Pentecost. That resulted in many coming to faith, many “calling on the name of the LORD.” God gives His Spirit to us, not to make us “spiritual” or to make us feel more “spiritual”, but so that people can be saved.

Whom does the Spirit fill? When our text says, “I will pour out My Spirit on all people,” the “all people” refers to all Israel, to all God’s chosen people. God was giving all Israel the power and ability to proclaim His message. Moses had earlier expressed, “How I desire all of you to be prophets.” Today Israel (or “all people”) refers to you and me—the people of God, the followers of Jesus. The Holy Spirit fills you and me, not so we float around feeling good about how spiritual we are, but to move us into action.

But can we all prophesy? Isn’t that the pastor’s job on a Sunday morning? At a wedding a few weeks ago a young boy named Sam who was the ring bearer was patiently waiting for the wedding to start. He wrote these words which he gave to me:

Behold for the Lord has risen. He gave us plants, food, and drink, but above all He made us and gave us His Son who died for us so we can be His people.

No, not all of us can preach or maybe even write what Sam did. But when God says “people” He is not talking about individuals. He is talking about the people of God. As a people we are filled by the Spirit into action. Look what happened to the disciples after Pentecost. They did miraculously speak in different languages, but what people really noticed for a lasting time is what they did later. We read in Acts 2, “Selling all their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of the people.” After describing that, Luke, who authored the book of Acts, wrote, “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” The Spirit fills us not to make us feel good, but to direct us to share God’s love so that through that love God can save other people.

What keeps us from being filled by the Spirit? “I will pour out My Spirit.” That isn’t something we do. It doesn’t depend on our prayers or how devout we are. The Spirit is out and around breathing life, even if we don’t realize it. But do we stand in the way of letting the Spirit fill us?

9-year-old Sierra Ross recently moved with her family from Florida to Seattle. In her new home she picked up the phone, dialed it, and heard something strange. She called her dad over to the phone and asked him, “This noise on the phone, what is it?” Her dad listened and heard a busy signal. Sierra had never heard that before. She had heard answering machines, fax and modem noises, call waiting, multiple lines, and dial tones, but never a busy signal.

Do we have a “busy signal” in our lives? It can seem like a sin for us to admit we are too busy to do all that we want to do. We want to do everything and take care of everyone, but does that give us the chance to say “do not disturb” and let the Spirit fill our lives? I am not talking about sitting up on a hill meditating, but do we take time besides Sunday morning for ourselves to read or hear God’s Word and pray and interact with God?

Auto experts tell us that one of the major causes of accidents and car problems is lack of tire care. Tires need to be kept inflated. It is not something that just happens. It needs to be checked regularly. We need “tire checks” again and again. That is what church, Bible study, time with Christian friends and family can do for us. Those can be opportunities for the Spirit to fill our lives and fill us for action.

The prophet Joel is giving that wonderful promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost describing the evil that was going on in his time. God would punish that evil by sending a plague of locusts. Locusts are grasshoppers on steroids. When in times of stress the grasshoppers are crowded and rub against each other they turn into “super-grasshoppers” that are much bigger, can fly long distances, and eat everything in sight. In minutes they can destroy a year of crops. But what stops them? Wind—the wind that blows them out to sea. The wind which describes the work of the Holy Spirit, the one who blows life into us.

The disciples on Pentecost were waiting as Jesus told them to do. They weren’t so involved with the concerns of this world that they didn’t have time for the Spirit. Jesus also calls us to wait, to make ourselves available for the Holy Spirit, so He can fill our lives. Are we filled? God promised, “I will pour out My Spirit.” He did on Pentecost, and He does today. The Holy Spirit comes to us now as we hear God’s Word and come to Jesus’ supper. God grant that we let Him fill us and fill us to share God’s love with the people in our lives.